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MONTANA DNRC Conversation

A Newsletter of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation • Director Bud Clinch
Spring 2004

— FIGHTING LEAFY SPURGE —

When folks think about northeastern Montana, thoughts usually resonate with dinosaurs, the Badlands, Fort Peck Reservoir, fishing, and family vacations. Noxious weeds do not come readily to mind, but they should. Infestations have occurred throughout the western United States, and northeastern Montana is no exception. In fact, this part of the state has experienced some of the worst infestations of *Euphorbia esula*, commonly known as leafy spurge. However, thanks to some proactive thinking by some resource specialists in several agencies, the war on leafy spurge is being won.

Photo by NELO staff

An unlikely hero - the leafy spurge flea beetle

Leafy spurge began to show up in Valley, Sheridan, Daniels, and Roosevelt Counties over 15 years ago. As with most noxious weeds in Montana, the weeds were brought in by a variety of methods. "Whatever the cause, the weeds took hold and began to choke out our native grasses and plants," said Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Glasgow Unit Manager Hoyt Richards. Richards administers Montana's state school trust lands throughout seven counties located in northeastern Montana. "However, since we began our work to rid the country of this weed, we've really made a difference."

One main factor in the success against the spurge is one of the largest natural insectaries in this part of the U.S. for leafy spurge flea beetles, or more specifically, the *Aphthona lacertosa* and *Aphthona nigriscutis*. In fact, the insectary is so large that DNRC, in conjunction with its partners, collected over 5 million flea beetles in 2002 and over 3.3 million in 2003. Even more amazing is that it was done in a very short time frame!

"I believe that you could go into that insectary (northeastern Montana) and collect for a month solid and still not get all the beetles out of that area," exclaimed Beth Klempel, natural resource specialist and weed coordinator with the Glasgow Field Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

DNRC took a strong stance on leafy spurge in 1996. At that time, Craig Roberts, who then was area manager of DNRC's Northeastern Land Office and Richards's supervisor, acquired well over 400,000 of the weed-killing beetles from the Agricultural Research Station in Valley City, North Dakota. This first collection was made possible thanks to Dr. Robert Carlson of North Dakota State University, Fargo.

Roberts delivered the beetles to several sites throughout central Montana and northeastern Montana.

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"To help ensure Montana's land and water resources provide benefits for present and future generations"

Leafy Spurge *continued from page 1*

From the original release, the beetle population exploded at one particular site, south of Culbertson. Today that site serves the entire state, providing mainly *A. lacertosa* (about 90 percent), but also providing *A. nigriscutis* (10 percent).

This was also the beginning of an alliance of natural resource agencies working together to control leafy spurge. From the time the first beetles were released in northeastern Montana, DNRC, BLM, and county weed coordinators have been working together on numerous levels in the war on weeds. That collaboration continues today with each agency bringing a variety of resources and expertise. "None of the agencies could do it alone," explained Valley County Weed Coordinator Rick Stellflug. "But, by combining our efforts and working together, we've really taken a toll on spurge in this part of the state."

In mid to late June, the agencies get together to begin the flea beetle collection process, which lasts only a short time. "We have only a few weeks to collect the beetles," Richards explained. "We want to capture them right before they begin to lay their eggs. This way, after they've been relocated to new areas, they can lay their eggs and start new beetle colonies." The collection takes place over approximately a two-week period. Over the years, the time required to capture and release the insects has increased. However, the positive on-the-ground effects are being seen all across northeastern Montana.

Upon collection, the beetles are packaged into paper containers and put on blue ice in coolers. Each container houses about 3,500 beetles, with about 30 to 35 containers in each cooler. Upon packaging, the coolers or containers make it to their destination in 24 hours or less, if possible. "When the time comes to collect bugs, we're all business," Richards noted. He credited Randy Dirkson, Jeanine Markle, and Craig Biggart, co-workers in the Glasgow Unit Office.

Photo by NELO staff

Shawn Morgan, NELO shows off a bug collection.

"We're on the road at 4:30 a.m. and get back in the office around 3:00 p.m. The following day, we are on the road early in the morning releasing the beetles in new locations. But it's worth it, because we can see the results on the ground."

The collection and use of the beetles have gained some fame over the last several years. Richards is not only delivering beetles in northeastern Montana, he is also making sure that the beetles are being spread out statewide. DNRC resource specialists throughout Montana, especially in the Central, Eastern, Northeastern, and Southern Land Offices, also lend their efforts to the program. In 2003, DNRC saw to it that beetles were collected and delivered to about a dozen counties in the state. "We are in the midst of trying to ensure that beetles are established on spurge populations throughout Montana. For example, in 2002 we sent about 60,000 beetles to the Elkhorn Mountains, southeast of Helena," said Richards.

Photo by NELO staff

Collecting beetles

In addition to spreading out statewide, the program has taken off internationally. Hundreds of thousands of beetles have gone north, across the Canadian border, to both Saskatchewan and Alberta.

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Leafy Spurge . . . *continued from page 2*

"We have a wonderful partner in these beetles and this insectary. As we harvest these beetles, we are helping not only ourselves, but anyone and everyone that wants help," Richards said.

The agencies all agree that the key to the use of beetles is time. The adult insects feast on the weed's stems and foliage; more damage is done by the larvae feeding on the roots. "You can't use these beetles and expect them to work overnight," Richards explained. "We generally tell people to have six years' worth of patience to see the dramatic change the beetles will have on the spurge and how little spurge will be left." Once the spurge is gone, the bugs move on, die off, or are collected and relocated to a new spurge patch.

Photo by NELO staff

Collecting beetles

Stellflug, Richards, and Klempel are realistic in knowing that beetles are only one means of managing the spurge. All three say that the most effective means has been through an integrated pest management approach with (1) biological control, (2) animal control (goats and sheep), and (3) chemical control. "Where we've used all three, we've seen a dramatic decrease in the spurge," said Klempel.

Photo by USDA-APHIS

Larvae

Why have county, state, and federal agencies banded together to fight the war on leafy spurge? "It all comes back to restoring the native grasses and range to what they were before the spurge came in, since it's non-native," stated Stellflug.

The mission statement of DNRC's Trust Land Management Division (TLMD) guides these types of management practices. Richards noted that fighting leafy spurge is part of TLMD's overall mission of ensuring that the State School Trust Fund is obtaining the highest return on its assets while protecting and enhancing the state's resources.

The eradication of this weed has many benefits, but Richards noted that the obligation to the trust is first and foremost. Elimination of leafy spurge would help DNRC to maximize revenue generation on the ground. "Additionally, controlling noxious weeds is the right thing to do. This is why we are serious about leafy spurge," explained Richards.

BLM's grazing program is similar to DNRC's. The other agencies involved also have similar obligations to protect the natural resources on the ground, and they take that seriously. "Since spurge is a Category 1 noxious weed, it just makes good resource management sense to eliminate it," Klempel stated.

DNRC has taken the lead in the battle against leafy spurge, but what really makes the war on weeds successful is the coordinated effort of many agencies. "The weeds spread across ownership boundaries, and when it comes to getting rid of these weeds, management should not recognize ownership boundaries, either," Klempel added.

However, each agency has some definite duties when it comes to fighting weeds. For example, the DNRC Glasgow Unit takes the lead in collecting the beetles, the county is responsible for the chemical spraying of spurge within the county boundary, and BLM is responsible for distributing beetles and also allowing the grazing of goats and

Leafy Spurge . . . *continued on page 4*

Leafy Spurge *continued from page 3*

sheep on its land. It is fair to say that there is a lot of overlap between each of those points, but that's where the coordination and teamwork pay off. "If folks from our office can't go out and collect one day, then Beth's folks will be out there doing it. And, if some beetles need to be distributed to a specific area or county, and we can help, we'll do it," Richards said. "It's not about mine and yours, or county-versus-state-versus-federal. It's about folks working and helping each other to make the landscape and state a better place."

An example of that is in nearby Sheridan County. According to Gary Steinberg, county weed coordinator, the insectary has been a real help. "It has allowed us (through getting beetles from the insectary) to develop the *A. lacertosa* and *A. nigriscutis* varieties in Sheridan County." Steinberg has been utilizing the beetles given to him by DNRC to fortify the beetles he had previously acquired.

In addition to working with neighboring counties, other groups and agencies such as the local conservation districts, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks are all doing their part in the fight against leafy spurge. And, all benefit from the work of each other when it comes to the fight against spurge. "It's a network of alliances that makes our fight work. If we weren't doing our part in Valley County, then Gary would have a lot more weeds in Sheridan County. That's why we all have been working together and will continue to do so, providing resources, or just bodies, when needed," Richards explained.

The use of cutting edge technology is becoming more prevalent in the war on the weeds in northeastern Montana. "Currently, we (BLM) have over 200 sites in northeastern Montana where we've released bugs and are in the midst of monitoring for things like topography, moisture, climate, and soil types," said Klempel. "This will help us to determine what areas work the best with these beetles. In the future, we'll then be able to better determine, based on those factors, whether we should use sheep or chemicals or our little friends." In addition, those sites are identified using a global positioning system, and photo points are established for historical/visual effects.

Along with using scientific technology, Richards, Stellflug, and Klempel are conducting informal experiments with the beetles, sheep and goats, and chemicals. "I will put out bugs in an area where I see spurge early in the spring. Then, I'll have the crews spray the area, and then I'll go out afterward to see how much effect the spray had on the bugs," Stellflug noted.

"We're anxious to see the results of the bugs we sent to the Elkhorn Mountains since we don't know the effect that elevation and snow have on these beetles," Richards added. "We are looking all the time at soil types, elevation, slope, aspect, moisture, etc. All these factors might have an effect on these beetles and on the spurge. The more we learn, the more efficient we'll become in eliminating spurge and returning the landscape to its natural state."

"The most effective tools we have are our teamwork and commitment," Klempel added.

Photo by NELO staff

Beetles at work

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Leafy Spurge . . . *continued from page 4*

Through their cooperative efforts, the agencies have gained advocates and supporters of the program and changed some attitudes and perspectives, not only about the biological control of noxious weeds, but also about the agencies themselves. "We have more and more people that are being exposed to the benefits of beetles, so each year we're giving more and more beetles away to private landowners. This has made, and will continue to make, a difference in that we're all moving in the same direction — the county, the state, the feds, but especially the private landowners. As I said before, we'll never completely eradicate spurge from this state, but we will get it down to the point where a single landowner will be able to control the spurge on his or her place, and it won't be cost-prohibitive," Richards explained. "Equally or maybe more important is that it has taken some of the public perception that we're just bureaucrats behind a desk and thrown that out the window! Folks are realizing that we really do care about the land that we manage."

Leafy spurge - before

and

Leafy spurge - after

Photos by NELO staff

An example of that change in attitude is Carter Harmon. Harmon, a rancher in northeastern Montana, was very skeptical about the use of beetles on spurge in the beginning. "Now he's one of our biggest advocates," Richards said. Harmon has been a recipient of thousands of beetles from the northeastern Montana insectary. "It's an excellent program for me because I was spending over $5,000 a year to eliminate spurge with chemicals. Now, I spend maybe $500 a year," Harmon said. Previously, Harmon used both sheep and chemical application to assist in weed control. However, since using beetles, he has reduced the size of his sheep herd to about 100 sheep and lowered his chemical bill substantially. "Some of my land is in areas that I can't get to or is too close to the Missouri River to use chemicals. That's why these beetles work slick," he noted. Harmon is fully behind the program now, helping collect beetles as well as delivering them to his neighbors. "It's simply an excellent program," he added.

Klempel and Stellflug were asked what their ultimate goal is, with all of their work and effort. "My dream is to travel some of these roads and not see any spurge," responded Klempel. "In simple terms, we want to get to a point where we can handle all of the spurge ourselves, and we're getting there," she said. Stellflug interjected, "We're starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel by not letting the weeds get a foothold and develop a monoculture. We're getting it done, together!"

— WEST YELLOWSTONE COMPOSTING PLANT —

The grizzly bears have moved to greener pastures. No longer do they congregate each summer evening to rummage the West Yellowstone landfill and have their pictures taken. Now occupying the site of the former landfill is a new and innovative composting facility that features the latest in solid waste handling and disposal technologies.

Completed in the spring of 2003, the facility was financed with a $4.136 million loan to Gallatin County-Hebgen Basin Refuse District through DNRC's State Revolving Fund (SRF) Loan Program. The 20-year loan bears interest at the rate of 4 percent. The preliminary engineering was funded through DNRC's Renewable Resource Grant and Loan Program.

Photo by Bob Fischer

Steel-framed building under construction in January 2003

The facility combines all phases of the composting process under one roof. Solid waste is being hauled to the plant from Yellowstone National Park and the West Yellowstone community in trucks under contract with BFI, a large solid waste contractor. Non-compostable materials are manually separated from the hauled materials and trucked to a landfill near Logan, about 100 miles north of West Yellowstone. The remaining, compostable materials are then processed through a system of mills, separators, composting tunnels, and drying floors. The final product will be a rich compost suitable for sale or for use within Yellowstone Park and Gallatin County as an enriching soil additive and for other landscaping.

The facility is now in full operation, with three people working full-time. More help will be needed during the summer, when the greatest volume of garbage is received. Between 5,000 and 6,000 tons of garbage are expected at the plant each year.

Photo by Bob Fischer

With only one year of operation, the facility is serving the park and the community and breaking even financially. However, the first of the compost will be completely cured and ready to sell this fall. At that time, in concurrence with the business plan, the plant should begin to show a profit, and possibly the debt can be repaid sooner.

The composting plant was designed by Allied Engineering of Bozeman and constructed by Dick Anderson Construction of Helena. It represents a partnership that includes DNRC, Gallatin County, the City of West Yellowstone, and Yellowstone National Park. Additionally, it represents a new technology and is serving as a prototype for future composting operations in Montana.

The West Yellowstone project is the only composting plant that has received SFR funds to date. Other SRF loans have funded wastewater treatment facilities, lagoons, and collection systems.

Photo by Bob Fischer

Plant interior showing process equipment

NEW STATE OFFICE BUILDING IN BOZEMAN

On March 29, 2004, DNRC personnel in Bozeman moved into their new offices. The building is shared with staff from three other state agencies (the Departments of Agriculture, Corrections, and Revenue). The move marks the conclusion of a project that involves a partnership of state and private interests and has been in the making for more than five years.

The office building sits on a portion of a 33-acre tract of school trust land located on Baxter Lane and situated along Interstate 90 between the Bozeman 19th Street and 7th Avenue exits. According to Area Manager Garry Williams of DNRC's Central Land Office, the state land was part of the original school grant to the State of Montana and had been leased for generations by the Mandeville family for agricultural production. The tract was physically severed from the larger parcel to the north when Interstate 90 was initially constructed. However, despite substantial development on all sides of the property, John Mandeville continued to farm the smaller tract of state land through 1998, when the Trust Land Management Division (TLMD) began to contemplate other income-producing uses.

Photo by Bob Harrington

The original subdivision plat showed 8 lots, but infrastructure has now been installed for 12 lots.

At the same time, the Department of Administration (DOA) was attempting to acquire office space for state agencies in the Bozeman vicinity. Several agencies needed to relocate or expand their office facilities, and DOA was interested in consolidating state agencies into a single, long-term lease rather than having numerous, individual, short-term leases scattered throughout the city. TLMD was contacted by a realty development corporation to see whether DNRC would be interested in providing a site for a state office building in Bozeman. Negotiations between SDA/SBC Limited Liability Corporation, the Department of Administration, the Montana Board of Investments, and DNRC resulted in a plan. DNRC would provide a site for the office building, which SDA/SBC would construct and subsequently sell to the Montana Board of Investments, who would in turn execute a long-term lease through the Department of Administration for state agency office space.

"Conceptually, the plan was relatively simple and logical, but addressing all the details and implementing the plan, while meeting all the cooperators' individual requirements, proved to be quite challenging," said Williams. "The project was successful only through the perseverance, commitment to succeed, and willingness to compromise of all individuals involved."

The state land was located outside but adjacent to the city limits and was zoned for agricultural use. Consequently, DNRC needed to apply for a zone map amendment to allow light industrial use (office buildings) and request annexation into the City of Bozeman. At the same time, the parcel needed to be subdivided to identify a separate lot on which the proposed office building was to be constructed. DNRC contracted with an engineering firm to draft a proposed plat to subdivide the entire 33 acres into 2- to 5-acre lots, design infrastructure needs, prepare cost estimates, and submit the plat for subdivision review. SDA/SBC developed a preliminary building design for DOA to determine agency occupancy, square footage requirements, and office design criteria. The Board of Investments needed estimates of the building's purchase price as well as the potential lease rates that DOA could negotiate with the occupying agencies. The cost estimates for both the preliminary building and subdivision designs were used as the basis for the land lease agreement executed in May 2000 between DNRC and SDA/SBC (to be transferred to the Board of Investments upon sale of the building) and the

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preliminary purchase agreement between the Board of Investments and SDA/SBC.

Meanwhile, the City of Bozeman was experiencing a period of unprecedented growth throughout the area, but particularly along the 19th Street corridor, and was struggling with issues such as impact fees, staff workload, and growth planning. Consequently, the city placed a moratorium on building projects in the vicinity of 19th Street until all of the primary traffic flow infrastructure was installed. The moratorium effectively delayed the state office building project for several years.

As a result, one of the agencies originally planning to relocate to the office complex withdrew from the agreement and relocated to another facility. One of the requirements imposed by the Board of Investments was for DOA to guarantee full occupancy upon transfer of the building; therefore, another tenant was needed. Williams said that, despite the turmoil surrounding budget deficits during the 2001 Legislative Session, DOA was successful in locating another tenant. However, the office configuration and space requirements were substantially different than originally planned, and SDA/SBC needed to redraft a building design to meet the new tenant's specifications.

Williams noted that, inevitably, the construction delay took its toll on the original cost estimates for both the building itself and installation of the infrastructure necessary for subdivision approval. The building redesign increased architectural and engineering costs for the developer, the City of Bozeman placed additional design modifications as a result of its concern over entryway visibility, and the overall construction costs increased. The increased costs impacted the lease rates for all agencies and the sale agreement with the Board of Investments.

Photo by Jim Kalitowski

New state office building in Bozeman

Ultimately, new agreements had to be negotiated, and all parties involved sacrificed some of their original goals. The Department of Administration accepted slightly higher lease rates, the Board of Investments reduced its anticipated return on investment, SDA/SBC lowered its profit margin on the construction of the building, and the Trust Land Management Division of DNRC paid for much of the construction cost overrun. The end result is a very successful project where all parties have benefited.

DNRC received $300,000 worth of roadwork, city sewer, city water, lights, and electricity for the 12 commercial lots in the subdivision in exchange for granting the office building lease on one of the lots. Williams estimated that the remaining commercial lots, when completely leased, would generate an annual income of $250,000 to $400,000. Historically, the agricultural lease had produced an average of approximately $1,000 per year.

SDA/SBC made a modest profit on the construction of the building. It is also laying the groundwork for similar projects and is exploring options for additional buildings within the subdivision, according to Williams.

The Montana Board of Investments invested approximately $2 million of its funds to purchase the completed office building. It has a long-term lease with a dependable lessee which the board is confident will be relatively stable with little risk of vacancy. The board projects approximately an 8 percent annual return on its investment.

The Department of Administration secured a single, long-term, and stable lease under which the agencies can predict rental expenses. For DNRC, the cost of the facilities is about 15 percent greater than the former lease, but the old lease had expired and was subject to renegotiation. The new building has a 15-year term, and the rental expense can increase no more than 3 percent per year for increased cost of janitorial services, etc.

Nine DNRC employees made the move in March. Six work in the Water Resources Regional Office (Regional Manager Scott Compton, Wendell Williams, Debi Pierce, Jan Mack, Porter Dassenko, and Rusty Taylor), and three work in the Bozeman Unit Office (Unit Manager Jim Kalitowski, Curt Tesmer, and Susan Marie Smith). "They had an opportunity to participate in the design of the office space and are very happy with the facilities," remarked Williams, "although the outdoor patio and indoor conference room are still being completed."

HELPING THE COUNTIES FIGHT FIRES

The summer 2003 edition of *DNRConversation* highlighted the initial attack responsibilities and capabilities of DNRC. The following article highlights an equally important arm of DNRC's fire suppression responsibility, the State/County Co-op Program.

Fires in Montana come in a variety of shapes and sizes and occur throughout the state, from the prairies to the mountains, and everywhere in between.

Although it is often thought that the most devastating fires occur in the western part of Montana, that's not always the case. As evidenced by the summer of 2003 fire season and the start of the 2004 fire season, fires in central and eastern Montana have been equally disastrous. The differences are mainly in the types of fuels that the fires burn in, the sparsely populated landscape in comparison to that of western Montana, and the agencies involved with fire suppression, including DNRC, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the often overlooked rural, county, and volunteer fire departments throughout this part of the state.

What role do these fire departments play in wildland fire suppression in our state?

A big part, according to Mike Wiederhold, rural fire coordinator for DNRC's Fire and Aviation Management Bureau. Their role is vital in DNRC's ability to suppress wildland fires throughout eastern Montana. Commonly referred to as the State/County Co-op Program, it is equal in importance to DNRC's Direct Protection Fire Program.

The fire protection responsibilities of DNRC's Forestry Division began with 50,000 acres at Bigfork in 1922. The geographical area receiving direct protection from DNRC today is 100 times larger. Now, DNRC has direct protection responsibility for 5,168,942 acres of state, private, and public lands.

Under the State/County Cooperative Fire Protection Program, the department also has secondary protection responsibility for 45,309,480 acres of state-owned and privately owned non-forested lands. These lands are predominantly found in eastern Montana. A network of 400 fire departments provides initial response to wildfires in all 56 counties in Montana.

Overview

The first state-county cooperative fire protection agreement was entered into between the state and Meagher County in 1967, and, with the addition of the last three counties in recent years, all counties in Montana now participate in this program. Under these agreements, the state provides organizational and planning assistance, equipment, and training to the county. Each county, in turn, is obligated to fight wildland fire on all state-owned and private ground not protected by an existing fire agency, such as DNRC or USFS. The county forces consist of a combination of paid and volunteer staff from county government, rural fire districts, fire service areas, county rural fire departments, and volunteer fire companies.

For the first time in Montana's history, some form of fire protection covers all land against the spread of wildland fire (although some people in this state are still without structural fire protection for their homes and improvements). DNRC assists counties when fires exceed their capability, provides training in wildland fire fighting, conducts fire prevention campaigns, provides administrative support to county fire agencies through involvement in the county rural fire councils and fire protective associations, and supplies Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) fire equipment on loan.

Equipment

Through its Equipment Development Program, DNRC obtains federal excess property and develops it into fire suppression equipment and vehicles. This equipment is used primarily to support the State/County Cooperative Fire Protection Program. In FY 2003, DNRC obtained supplies, vehicles, and aircraft that have a total value of $944,330 through FEPP. The equipment acquired included a total of 30 vehicles and aircraft.

The DNRC Fire and Aviation Management Bureau, Equipment Development Center (EDC), provides about 350 wildland fire engines and water tenders to local fire agencies, primarily in the eastern part of the state. The FEPP fire equipment in the counties consists mostly

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of Type 6 wildland engines and slip-on pump units. Several pieces of Type 1 and 2 structural engines and water tenders are also positioned in various county rural fire departments through the State/County Co-op Program. The majority of this is FEPP equipment refurbished to like-new condition at DNRC's Equipment Development Center and then loaned to the counties.

The EDC compound consists of a machine shop, a paint booth, a welding shop, three large garage bays, warehouse storage for equipment purchased by the state as well as FEPP fire equipment, covered storage for fire pumps and hose reels, and approximately 5 acres of outside storage for the many FEPP vehicles required for conversion to fire engines. These converted vehicles are utilized throughout the state in both DNRC's Direct Protection Fire Program and the State/County Co-op Program. Six full-time employees work at EDC.

Photo by CLO staff

Training: Engine Academy

In addition to providing equipment, DNRC conducts training for fire departments around the state, but especially for firefighters in fire departments participating in our State/County Co-op Program. This training consists of certification training for first time wildland firefighters as well as recertification training for fire veterans. The courses include Standards of Survival, Use and Care of Hand Tools, Fire Shelter Deployment, Incident Command System, Communications, and Fire Behavior.

Wildland engine academies are a new trend in training within the State/County Co-op Program. These academies are generally two- to three-day training sessions where departments are brought in to work in a fire environment under the direction of DNRC, USFS, BLM, or other

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SNAPSHOT
What Does DNRC's Equipment Development Center Build?

Type 6 (200-gallon) wildland engines –1-ton pickup
Type 5 (500-gallon) engines
Type 3 (750-gallon) engines
Water tenders (1,500- to 3,000-gallon water tank trucks)
Shop trucks for maintenance/communications
Flatbeds for general unit/area office transport
Firefighting water pumps
"Slip-on units" that will slip onto the back of pickup trucks
Fuel trucks for hauling fuel for helicopters and vehicles

DNRC maintains a fleet of over 200 state-purchased fire apparatus from Type 3 to Type 6 wildland engines. The Type 3's are being designed and built to operate in wildland/urban interface areas with the cooperation of local government structural engines and water tenders. The majority of this co-op county equipment is Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) screened by the state and on loan to the counties.

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agency personnel. The Central Montana Wildland Engine Academy was held in Cascade on May 14 to May 16 this year. The academy, developed and spearheaded by DNRC Helena Unit Fire Supervisor Rick Grady, had over 200 people in attendance, 30 engines, 5 water tenders, and a helicopter. "The academy provides an opportunity for our partners in the co-op program to learn and develop skills necessary to safely and aggressively suppress fire, as well as manage a fire, under the eyes of agency personnel," Grady explained. The DNRC Central Land Office (CLO) has been conducting the engine academy for three years and has found it to be a good way of providing solid training to the fire departments in and around central Montana. "It has helped to strengthen our program from the relationship perspective and the skill level," Grady said. "Overall, it's been a great program for CLO."

Morning briefing at the 2004 Central Montana Wildland Engine Academy

Grants/Funding

Besides training, DNRC provides grant opportunities to fire departments throughout the state. The Volunteer and Rural Fire Assistance (VFA/RFA) Program provides assistance to county fire agencies for equipment, training, and fire prevention materials. Adding National Fire Plan funding has resulted in a grant program with more money than ever before. The Department of the Interior agencies (BLM, FWS, and BIA) contributed their budgeted Rural Fire Assistance Program dollars to be combined with Volunteer Fire Assistance funds granted by the Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The grants are cost share monies made available to departments to defray up to 90 percent of the cost of improving their local fire protection. According to Wiederhold, eligible applicants are municipal fire departments, rural fire districts, fire service areas, volunteer fire companies, or other fire service organizations in communities with populations of 10,000 or less. The maximum grant amount for a single applicant is $20,000. Departments from around the state submit applications for projects such as department or district organization and planning, fire prevention, fire training, and fire equipment.

In 2003, the grant program received applications requesting $2.2 million, almost double the amount of funding available. Seventy-four grants were awarded, totaling the $1.2 million received from the Forest Service and the other agencies, and DNRC and its partners were recognized with the Ben Franklin Award, given by the Forest Service annually to one state for excellence in delivering these programs.

The total assistance available in Montana for the year 2004 VFA/RFA Programs is $1.1 million.

Conclusion

It's easy to see that the DNRC State/County Co-op Program is another viable arm to DNRC's fire protection responsibility. The agency is tasked with fire protection for millions of acres. Without the assistance of rural, county, and volunteer fire departments across Montana, our jobs would be much more difficult.

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